

**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA ITEM TRANSMITTAL**

(1) DEPARTMENT Administrative Office	(2) MEETING DATE 10/14/2014	(3) CONTACT/PHONE Lisa Howe/781-5025	
(4) SUBJECT Presentation of current drought conditions, related management actions, and response plans. All Districts.			
(5) RECOMMENDED ACTION It is recommended that the Board receive the presentation on current drought conditions, related management actions, and response plans.			
(6) FUNDING SOURCE(S) N/A	(7) CURRENT YEAR FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(8) ANNUAL FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(9) BUDGETED? N/A
(10) AGENDA PLACEMENT { } Consent    { } Presentation    { } Hearing (Time Est. ____ )    { <b>X</b> } Board Business (Time Est. <u>60 Minutes</u> )			
(11) EXECUTED DOCUMENTS { } Resolutions    { } Contracts    { } Ordinances    { <b>X</b> } N/A			
(12) OUTLINE AGREEMENT REQUISITION NUMBER (OAR) N/A		(13) BUDGET ADJUSTMENT REQUIRED? BAR ID Number: { } 4/5 Vote Required    { <b>X</b> } N/A	
(14) LOCATION MAP N/A	(15) BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT? No	(16) AGENDA ITEM HISTORY { <b>X</b> } N/A    Date: _____	
(17) ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE REVIEW Guy Savage			
(18) SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S)  All Districts.			

# County of San Luis Obispo



TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Administrative Office / Lisa Howe  
781-5025

DATE: 10/14/2014

SUBJECT: Presentation of current drought conditions, related management actions, and response plans. All Districts.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Board receive the presentation on current drought conditions, related management actions, and response plans.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Background**

California is facing one of the most severe droughts on record. The lack of rain has caused record low rivers, reservoirs, snowpack, and groundwater levels throughout California. On January 15, 2014, the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Declared 27 Counties in California, including San Luis Obispo, to be designated as primary natural disaster areas due to drought conditions. Subsequently, on January 17, 2014, Governor Edmond G. Brown Jr. proclaimed a State of Emergency calling for all Californians to reduce their water usage by 20 percent.

San Luis Obispo County has experienced below normal levels of precipitation for the previous three rainy seasons. Rainfall amounts in the County have made it the driest year on record. Since February 20, 2014, all areas of the County have remained in an "Exceptional Drought" (D-4) intensity rating as reported by the U.S. Drought Monitor. The U.S. Drought Monitor measures intensity levels on a five-scale rating from D-0 to D-4. Significant impacts associated with drought conditions include a loss in agricultural production, drinking water shortages, decline in water quality, threat to wildlife, and fire danger, among others.

The County Administrative Officer has assembled a County Drought Task Force to coordinate drought monitoring, impact assessments, responses to emergency health and safety, and public communication and outreach.

On March 11, 2014, upon staff's recommendation, the Board adopted a resolution proclaiming a local emergency due to drought conditions in San Luis Obispo County. Section 8630 of the California Government Code and County Code Chapter 2.80.070 (2) require that the Board of Supervisors review the need for continuing the local emergency at least every 30 days until such emergency is terminated.

The Drought Task Force continues to meet to monitor drought conditions, reduction efforts, and county preparedness.

### **Water Conditions and Drought Impacts**

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor report released Thursday, October 2, 2014 indicates San Luis Obispo County remains at the D4 – Exceptional Drought intensity rating (Attachment 1). Approximately 95% of California is at a level D-2 Severe Drought or worse with 58% of the state at a D-4 level. Reservoir levels remain significantly lower than the average

percentage capacity for this time of year including: Nacimiento 17% (64,750 acre feet); Lopez 45% (22,421 acre feet); Salinas 24% (5,759 acre feet); and Whale Rock 48% (18,754 acre feet) of capacity (Attachment 2).

#### Agricultural Impacts

Agricultural conditions continue to deteriorate due to drought conditions. The California Department of Food and Agriculture and the University of California, Davis, jointly funded the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences to estimate economic impacts of the current drought on California agriculture. The total statewide economic cost of the 2014 drought is estimated to be \$2.2 billion, with a total loss of 17,100 seasonal and part-time jobs<sup>1</sup>.

Staff from the County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures and the San Luis Obispo County Office of the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) collaborated to create an agricultural producer survey to help compile information about the effects of the drought on the local agricultural industry. The monthly survey is sent to producers, local agricultural organizations and UCCE Farm Advisors representing a wide variety of crops and livestock providing a good picture of on-the-ground conditions and impacts from the drought.

The current drought conditions have had unequal impacts on local agricultural production systems, depending upon whether or not the crops are irrigated, and what the source of the irrigation water is. Non-irrigated crops have generally suffered the most extensive and severe production losses. Crops irrigated from large groundwater basins have maintained normal production levels if growers applied additional water to make up for the lack of rainfall, however elevated salinity levels may be causing yield declines even with adequate irrigation in some areas. Crops irrigated from smaller groundwater sources (identified small basins or other water-bearing formations) have more commonly experienced significant reductions in water availability, with some sources becoming completely dry in severe cases.

Loss of income and reduced production levels continue throughout the county, affecting many commodities, as well as increased expenses from re-tooling irrigation systems. Quality issues of final products associated with lack of adequate irrigation water and increased salinity in the root zone are developing. Livestock producers continue to sell animals, haul in water, and buy feed to maintain reduced herds. It is estimated that 75% of livestock have been sold or moved out of the county. Survey respondents indicate that another dry year would be catastrophic for some in these industries as additional ground would have to be idled potentially leading to unemployment issues.

The County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures and the San Luis Obispo County Office of the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) continue to track and update the public on various Agricultural Drought Assistance Programs. Emergency Disaster Program information is included in Attachment 3.

#### Fire Danger

Drought conditions can increase the intensity and severity of wildfires. Dry, hot and windy weather, combined with dry vegetation and a spark can start a wildfire. In the aftermath of wildfires, ash, woody debris and sediment can flow downstream from burn areas and contaminate water supplies. To date, CAL FIRE has responded to 5,038 wildfires across the state since January 1, burning 90,731 acres. This year's fire activity is above the year-to-date average of 4,036 wildfires on 86,987 acres.

In San Luis Obispo County, from January through July, there have been 97 wildfires, which burned 89 acres. Since 2007, averages for this same period are 110 wildfires burning 438 acres. Statistics beyond July are not yet available. The wildfire potential in the County has reached a critical level. The low moisture in the vegetation has set new records for dryness. The stage is set for a large and destructive fire if one were to start and be driven by winds and slope. Not only is a fire like this potentially destructive, it also will require large amounts of valuable water to contain thus impacting the communities that the fire is near.

In order to reduce potential ignitions CAL FIRE/San Luis Obispo suspended all burning permits and open fires within the State Responsibility Area and within the Local Responsibility Area under contract with CAL FIRE on July 1, 2014. This burn suspension will remain in effect until there is enough precipitation to reduce the fire threat.

#### Economic Impacts

Negative economic impacts continue to mount due to drought conditions. Drought-related job losses are continuing to

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<sup>1</sup> Howitt, R.E., Medellin-Azuara, J., MacEwan, D., Lund, J.R. and Sumner, D.A. (2014). Economic Analysis of the 2014 Drought for California Agriculture. Center for Watershed Sciences, University of California, Davis, California. 20p. Available at <<http://watershed.ucdavis.edu>>

increase across the state. The San Luis Obispo County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) is gathering information on local drought-related job impacts. This is part of a statewide survey by the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) as part of an ongoing online survey to inform the Governor's Drought Relief Task Force of the drought's ripple effects. The WIB's Drought Business Impact survey is available at <http://sloworkforce.com/drought-survey/>. Local Workforce Investment Boards, workforce partners, and other local workforce entities are encouraged to complete the survey regularly to keep the Governor's Drought Relief Task Force up to date on the local area. The WIB is conducting outreach to chambers of commerce and other business services agencies for assistance in outreach to businesses and employers regarding the drought survey. Though the WIB is hearing that there are impacts, the county does not have any "reportable" impacts due to the State's requirements for reporting (i.e. specific business name, address, etc.).

### **Related Management Actions and Response Plans**

#### **County Drought Task Force: Drought Monitoring and Response**

The Drought Task Force continues to utilize a number of survey tools and data sources to coordinate drought monitoring, impact assessments, responses to emergency health and safety, and public communication and outreach. The County Drought Task Force prepared an overview of current countywide data collection tools, water reduction efforts at County facilities and parks, state and federal assistance programs, county emergency response planning, and public communication efforts (Attachment 4).

#### **Agricultural Conditions**

The San Luis Obispo County Cooperative Extension in coordination with the Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures prepared a report to describing some of the principal drought impacts on San Luis Obispo County Agriculture (Attachment 5). The report focuses on the relationship between local agricultural production and the groundwater resources that provide the majority of the irrigation water in the region. The heavy reliance upon groundwater for irrigation sets this area apart from most other regions of California, where surface water sources have a more dominant role in supplying agricultural irrigation needs. An clear understanding of how the current drought conditions are playing out in the different farming sectors and situations within the County will help all parties make the most prudent management decisions if the current drought conditions continue, or if they return with similar severity in the future.

#### **Countywide Water Resources**

The Department of Public Works has outlined the department's approach to managing, over the next twelve months, County Operated water systems and related issues (Attachment 6). The attached County Water Systems One Year Look-Ahead memo describes the systems, issues, plans, and concerns for each of the major sub regions of the County where the Department of Public Works provides either retail or wholesale water supply services, followed by a State Water delivery discussion, the status of efforts in the Chorro Valley, and recent relevant legislative proposals and water regulations.

### **OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT/IMPACT**

At the onset of the Governor's declaration and under the direction of the County Administrative Officer, a County Drought Task Force was formed. The Drought Task Force is comprised of multiple County departments, including: the Administrative Office, Office of Emergency Services, Public Works, General Services, County Fire (CAL FIRE), Agricultural Commissioner, Planning and Building, Farm Advisor, Health Agency, and County Counsel. All member departments provided input for this report.

County Office of Emergency Services (OES) continues to be in in regular contact with Cal OES to receive and provide situation status information.

The Public Works continues to coordinate with local water purveyors and cities.

Public Health is coordinating with relevant State agencies, including the State California Department of Public Health and Emergency Medical Services Authority Health Coordination Center.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The long-term financial impact on the local economy, including the demand on County and other legal agency services, cannot be forecast at this time. The County continues to track drought-related costs.

## **RESULTS**

Provide an update on current drought conditions, related management actions, and response plans.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: USDA Drought Monitor Map

Attachment 2: Local Reservoir Conditions

Attachment 3: Emergency Disaster Programs for Response to the Drought

Attachment 4: County Drought Task Force Drought Monitoring and Response

Attachment 5: The 2014 drought: Impacts on San Luis Obispo County Agriculture

Attachment 6: County Water Systems One Year Look-Ahead